

School Improvement Conversation Starters For School District Visits



2012-2013 School Year

Iowa Department of Education

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BOARD OF EDUCATION 2012-2013

Board of Education - This interview should include less than a quorum of board members unless notice of the meeting has been properly published.

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and number of years you have served on the Board of Education and respond to this question: How does the board maintain focus on the district's current vision, mission, and goals?
2. How is the district preparing students to be college and career ready? Please include things such as: employability skills, working in a diverse environment, lifelong learning skills, and financial, health, civic, and technology literacy?
3. What do your data show about the achievement of all students (including students with disabilities, students whose families qualify for free and /or reduced meals, students from diverse racial/ethnic groups, students for whom English is a second language, and students who have been identified as talented and gifted?) What positive changes in achievement have occurred? What changes still need to occur?
4. How does the school board communicate district information to the public regarding finances, student achievement, Iowa Core Standards and other aspects of the district/school?
5. Describe the process and materials used to evaluate the Superintendent. How is the process currently being implemented benefiting the school board and the superintendent in their work toward continuous improvement?
6. In what ways does the school board seek input from administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community? Please provide examples.
7. What expectations does the board hold for the role of the district's equity coordinator in providing equity in programs and employment? Please provide examples.
8. In what ways does the district make connections with the community?
9. How is the school board kept informed of the district's professional development focus and results? How does the board plan for its own professional development?
10. What will be the board's role in helping the district meet its long-range goals? What supports have the board put in place to help the district move forward?
11. Please share what you believe to be your district's:
 - accomplishments over the past five years
 - obstacles delaying progress
 - changes hoped to be achieved in the next five years

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) TEACHERS -2012-2013

Career and Technical Education Teachers (vocational) (public schools). This interview should include high school representatives from each area of the career and technical education program offerings in grades 9-12.

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name, program area, and respond to this question:

What are the strengths of the program area you represent?

2. Please share **some** examples of how your program is integrating All Aspects of an Industry into your curriculum. The nine (9) components of All Aspects of an Industry include:

- Planning
- Management
- Finance
- Technical Skills
- Principles of Technology
- Labor Issues
- Community Issues
- Health and Safety
- Personal Work Habits

3. How do you ensure the safety of students in your shop/lab, and describe how you address the teaching and learning of safety components in your curriculum and program.
4. Give examples of how academic concepts are integrated into career and technical courses, and examples of application of these concepts are integrated into academic courses.
5. Would all students in your program say they feel safe in the classroom, **safe with their peers** and safe in their school? Why or why not?
6. How are you supported in participating in building, district, and CTE related professional development?
7. Tell us about the CTE Advisory committee or council's involvement with your CTE program. Include how they are involved in addressing the Program of Study requirements such as standards, benchmarks, critical competencies, performance indicators, technical skill attainment assessments and proficiency levels as required by Perkins.
8. Please give examples of how your district is moving toward meeting the six (6) Program of Study criteria in each of your programs.

9. Explain how you assisted in gathering/reporting/compiling CTE data for reporting purposes in CTE Project Easier. How is end-of-year performance data on your program used in the continuous improvement of your program?
10. Briefly describe the district's program evaluation process including the involvement of the Advisory Committee and the data collected and reviewed.
 - What impact has this had on your teaching and your program?
 - How have the findings from recent evaluations impacted progress or change in the CTE programs?

GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS 2012-2013
PreK-12

PreK-12 Teachers (group of 10-12 PreK-12 general education teachers): This interview should contain a group of 10-12 PreK through grade 12 teachers' representative of grade levels and content areas. The group should have a balanced representation of gender and include teachers of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds when possible. District enrollment will determine the number of PreK – 12 teacher interviews to be conducted.

1. Introduce yourself by stating your name, grade level or content area, and respond to this question: How do your professional practices align with the vision, mission, and goals of the district?
2. How are you encouraged and supported to take on leadership roles in your district and building?
3. Explain the teacher evaluation system and how it enhances instructional and professional practices?
4. Please describe the opportunities, purposes, and results of collaboration among:
 - Colleagues
 - Students
 - Parents
 - Community
5. What does the district do to create and sustain a safe learning and social environment for all students? To what degree is bullying/harassment occurring in your school? How are these instances addressed?
6. What tools and technology are available in your school and how do teachers use these to enhance instruction and student learning?
7. Describe the opportunities teachers have for district and building level conversations about curriculum, including implementation of the Iowa Core.
8. How are teachers involved in determining the focus of professional development, including teachers' individual professional development plans? How has the district's professional development helped to improve teaching and learning?
9. What do your data show about the achievement of all students (including students with disabilities, students whose families qualify for free/reduced meals, students from diverse racial/ethnic groups, students for whom English is a second language, and students who have been identified as talented and gifted)? What positive changes in achievement have occurred? What changes still need to occur?

10. What instructional changes have occurred to address achievement gaps?
11. How do teachers adjust their classroom instruction to meet individual student learning needs?
12. *NCLB required question:* Describe the process used to maintain security of the Iowa Assessments test materials prior to, during, and after test administration.
13. How does the district make connections with the community?
14. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT STAFF 2012-2013
PreK-12

PreK-12 Instructional Support Staff (group of 10-12 instructional support staff). **This interview is with paraprofessionals (e.g., Special Education and Title I). The group should have a balanced representation of gender and include staff of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds when possible.**

1. Introduce yourself by stating your name and assignment and respond to the following: Please describe the collaboration that occurs among paraeducators and classroom teachers.
2. Describe the instructional duties assigned to you by your supervising teacher.
3. How are you informed of your job role and responsibilities?
4. What training have you had to prepare you for your assignments?
5. What additional supports do you need to do your job well?
6. For those of you assigned as a one-to-one paraeducator for a student, how have you been trained to decrease students' dependency on your assistance?
7. What training and support have you received to prepare you for addressing student behavior and school climate issues, including bullying and harassment?
8. What is your role when the supervising teacher is out of the classroom for other assignments (e.g., to co-teach in a classroom)?
9. How does the district make connections with the community?
10. How does the evaluation process for paraeducators enhance job performance?
11. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

LEARNING SUPPORTS STAFF 2012-2013
PreK-12 (2 Interviews)

- 1) **PreK-12 Learning Supports Staff-(Gifted and Talented, Media, ESL, Title I, Technology)** - This interview should include staff members that coordinate programs and/or provide services PreK-12. Included should be the coordinators for Gifted and Talented, Media, ESL, Title I, and Technology.

- 2) **PreK-12 Learning Supports Staff - (Guidance, At-Risk, Alternative Program/School, School Nurse)** - This interview should include staff members that coordinate programs and/or provide services PreK-12. Included should be the coordinators for Guidance, At-Risk, and Alternative Program/School, and School Nurse.
 1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and the program you represent, and respond to this question: How does your program support the vision, mission, and goals of the district?

 2. Please describe the components of the program you represent, including:
 - identification criteria
 - program components
 - monitoring and evaluation processes
 - transition supports
 - exit criteria

 3. Please describe the opportunities you have for collaboration among colleagues, students, parents, and community.

 4. What does the district do to create and sustain a safe learning and social environment for all students? In what ways does your program contribute to a positive school climate for all students?

 5. What are the implications of Iowa Core implementation for your program and how are you aligning your program to the Iowa Core?

 6. How does professional development provided within or outside the district enhance your work with students and staff?

 7. What data points are used to determine program effectiveness (academic/non-academic) and what is being learned from these data?

 8. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

PARENTS / GUARDIANS 2012-2013
PreK-12

PreK-12 Parents/Guardians (group of 10-12 parents/guardians) - This group should reflect the PreK-12 system with the same demographic distribution as that for the student interviews (e.g., academic performance, college and non-college aspirations, gender, and race/ethnicity). Interviewees in this group should also be selected from parents of students who are receiving services through programs such as Special Education, At-Risk, English as a Second Language, Gifted and Talented, Title I, and Alternative School / Program. District enrollment will determine the number of PreK-12 parent/guardian interviews to be conducted.

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name, telling us about your children in school, and respond to this question: As a parent, what do you think the district, or your child's school, does well?
2. How does the district/school involve parents/guardians as partners in their child's education? How does the district involve community members?
3. In what ways and how frequently do you learn about your child's progress?
4. Are there any obstacles that stand in the way of your child's learning?
5. How does the district accommodate students with special learning needs in the regular education classroom (for example: students with IEP's, talented and gifted, and At-Risk)?
6. How does the district support learning experiences for children prior to kindergarten?
7. Describe the transition process that takes place as students move from level to level (Preschool to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, high school to post-secondary, etc.)
8. Do you think that your children are safe at school? What does your school/district do to ensure student safety? Are you aware of any incidents of violence during the last year that caused a student physical harm? If yes, what was done about it?
9. How does the district monitor and investigate reported incidents of bullying and harassment?
10. How are parents' concerns addressed and suggestions used?
11. How does the district make connections with the community?
12. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

PRINCIPALS 2012-2013
PreK-12

PreK-12 Building Principals – Elementary, middle school, high school, and alternative school principals may be interviewed as a group or individually at a designated site within the district. Follow-up interviews may be conducted with individual principals, if necessary. In large districts, a representative sample group of administrators may be selected for the interview. (The district's equity coordinator may be a part of this interview or part of the superintendent / curriculum director interview, as appropriate.)

1. As a principal, how do you communicate the district's vision, mission, and goals to staff, students, and parents?
2. How would teachers describe your building's shared vision of effective instruction? How do you as a principal foster the shared vision?
3. In what ways do principals seek and use input from staff, students, parents, and the community? Please provide examples of actions taken as a result of this input?
4. Explain the evaluation process used in the district. Has it lead to positive changes in instruction and student achievement?
5. How do principals promote a school-wide environment that is safe, healthy, inclusive, and caring for all students, staff, and families?
6. Describe your curriculum development process.
7. What process is in place for people to report a homeless child, youth, or family to the district? Does the district have a formal means of recording homelessness as it occurs throughout the year?
8. Describe the district and building leadership structure for determining the focus of professional development (including implementing, monitoring, and evaluating professional development).
9. How does professional development prepare all staff to address specific needs of students who have IEPs, are at-risk, potential dropouts, ELL, and/or gifted and talented?
10. What are the processes used by the district and buildings to collect and analyze formative and summative data regarding student achievement and program results? How is data analysis then used to plan next steps?
11. ***NCLB required question:*** Describe the process used to maintain security of the Iowa Assessments test materials prior to, during, and after test administration.

12. **Special Education Monitoring Question:** How are decisions made about IEP students' placement in classes?
13.) **Special Education Monitoring Question:** In what ways are enrollment patterns in classes monitored in regard to students with IEPs, particularly at the secondary level?
14. **Title IIA Required Question:** What steps does the district employ to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers?
15. How does the district make connections with the community?
16. Please share what changes you hope your district/school will achieve in the next five years.

Equity Coordinator:

1. How does the district notify staff, students, and parents about your role as Equity Coordinator?
2. How do students, parents, and staff get information about the district's procedure for processing grievances related to the non-discrimination and harassment policies?
3. What equity / diversity-related issues / grievances have you dealt with in the past year?
4. What are you doing to ensure that students and staff are culturally competent?
5. What have you learned from your most recent analysis of building, program, and course enrollment data by racial/ethnic background, gender, and disability?

SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES 2012-13

School Advisory Committees - This interview will include representatives from the district's School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC), Career and Technical Education Advisory Committee (CTE), and Title I Committee. **Note:** Not all districts choose to have a Title I Committee. If the district has a Title I Committee, please include representatives for this interview.

The interview groups should reflect diversity in terms of gender, racial/ethnic background, and disability, when possible, and should include, as mandated by law, students, community representatives, parents, staff, and school board members. This interview may consist of three 20-minute segments or two 30-minute segments with five minutes between each for interviewees to dismiss and the next group to enter.

PLEASE AVOID INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN OTHER INTERVIEWS.

SIAC

1. Introduce yourself by stating your name and representation and respond to this question:
What do you view as the strength of this committee?
2. What kind of information/data do you receive as a SIAC member? What does the SIAC do with the information?
3. How do school leaders involve the SIAC in the process of continuous improvement? What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this committee?
4. What training have you received in understanding and using data?
5. In the recent past, what are some of the recommendations this committee has made to the board of education?
6. Were the recommendations approved, and what has been the result?
7. Please tell us how the school and community work together, including sharing resources.
8. What do you hope to see as district goals are set and priorities are determined?

CTE Advisory (i.e., Vocational Advisory)

1. Introduce yourself by stating your name and representation and respond to this question:
What do you view as strengths of the district's CTE programs?
2. Is the CTE Advisory committee a regional advisory committee or a local advisory committee? What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this committee?
3. What data have you seen regarding the CTE programs and how are these data being used?
4. Describe your involvement in addressing the components required in a CTE Program of Study
 - Reviewing Standards and Benchmarks
 - Identifying critical competencies
 - Reviewing course sequence plans
 - Reviewing/approving Technical Skill Assessment Instruments
 - Determining Proficiency on Assessments
 - Determining who is tested
5. What changes do you think would be beneficial for the district's CTE programs?

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND COLLABORATIVE GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS
PreK-12
2012-2013

PreK – 12 Special Education and Collaborative General Education Teachers - This interview is with a random sampling of special education teachers and general education collaborative teachers representing PreK, elementary, middle school, and high school levels. The group should have a balanced representation of gender and include teachers of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds when possible. District enrollment will determine the number of PreK-12 special education and collaborative general education teacher interviews to be conducted.

Note: Please bring a copy of the new District Developed Service Delivery Plan to this interview.

1. Introduce yourself (name and assignment) and describe how your collaborative teaching practices reflect the vision, mission, and goals of the district?
2. Describe your specific general education and special education roles in meeting student needs.
3. How does the achievement of students with IEP's compare to that of students not receiving special education services?
4. How are you working to close the achievement gap between general education and students receiving special education services (i.e., evidence-based strategies, use of data, adjusting instruction)?
5. How do you monitor your students' progress toward closing the achievement gap?
6. You should be familiar with the District Developed Service Delivery Plan (DDSDP). The following questions focus on aspects of the plan.
 - What was your involvement in the plan development?
 - What were some key themes (big ideas) related to providing services in your district that were learned from involving stakeholders in the development of the DDSDP?
 - How has the DDSDP improved your district's services for eligible students? What are the activities or contents of the plan that has made a difference in services (i.e., instructional rigor, use of data)
7. The full continuum of special education services is included in your DDSDP, and these services are based on the individual needs of your students. In practice, describe how you provide services along the full continuum for students.
8. Please describe how general education and special education staff work together to coordinate **instruction and services** for students including those involving transitions from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, from one building to another, and from one grade level to another?

9. **Special Education Teacher:** Do you provide pull-out instruction for the student? If so, what specially designed instruction do you provide in those sessions?
10. **High School Teachers:** Please describe the planning and preparation that takes place for student transition to post-secondary experiences.
11. In what ways do the district and school ensure students have a safe, healthy, and caring learning environment?
12. The following questions are about collaborative teaching:
 - How does the district and building assess the effectiveness of collaborative teaching (e.g., the consultative model and the co-teaching model)?
 - What data points are collected to verify or refute the impact on student achievement?
 - What is the district learning about implementation?
 - Who uses that information?
 - Who assigns the grade to the student with an IEP?
13. How does the district make connections with the community?
14. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR / COORDINATOR 2012-2013

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION CADRE TEAM MEMBER

Special Education Director/Coordinator - This interview will be a focused one-on-one interview between the district's Special Education Director/Coordinator and the Special Education Cadre Team Member.

Note to District Special Education Director/Coordinator: Please be familiar with, and bring to the interview, the following:

- All special education Corrective Action/Action Plans (e.g., I-STAR, Part B Corrective Action Plan, CEIS / Disproportionality, Suspension / Expulsion, etc.)
- District special education data profile
- BEDS data for a conversation about collaborative teaching related to Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT)

CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN:

1. In what areas were your district found to be non-compliant?
2. What were the district's goals and subsequent actions?
3. What has the district put in place to assure that practice change is maintained?
4. How is the district closing any gaps between students with IEPs and general education students?
5. How has the district determined the root cause of its gaps and what are its findings?
6. If there are no gaps, how has the district achieved or maintained this?
7. Are there any Special Education Indicators in which the district is discrepant? What actions are being taken by the district? What actions would you need to close those gaps?

DDSDP

8. What was your involvement in the development of the DDSDP?
9. What are some key themes (big ideas) related to providing services in your district that were learned from involving stakeholders in the development of the DDSDP?
10. How was this input from stakeholders included in the DDSDP?

11. How is the DDSDP communicated to others?
 - General education teachers
 - Special education teachers
 - Parents
 - Others

12. The full continuum of special education services is included in your DDSDP and these services are based on the individual needs of your students. In practice, how do you provide services along the full continuum for students?

13. How has the DDSDP improved your district's services for eligible students? What are the activities or contents of the plan that has made a difference in services (increased rigor, use of data)?

14. Please describe the district's collaboration model at each level (e.g., elementary, middle, high school).

15. What training has been provided to the district's special and general education teachers regarding models of collaboration?

16. What gaps do you see between current practice and desired practice?

17. Does your district have any students who are National Instructional Materials Access Center (NIMAC) eligible? If so, how does accessing Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) work in your district?

HIGH SCHOOL / MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS 2012-2013

Grades 9-12 students (group of 10-12 students) – This student group will include students from the highest grade levels served by the district. The student interview group should reflect the student population, including demographic diversity in terms of academic performance, college and non-college aspirations, gender, and race/ethnicity. The student interview group should also reflect low, as well as middle and high, income representatives. Students in this group should be chosen from students who are receiving services from programs such as alternative school, Special Education, At-Risk, English as a Second Language, Gifted and Talented, and Title I.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

Grades 6-8 students (group of 10-12 students) – This student group will include students from the highest grade levels served by the district/school. The student interview group should reflect the student population, including demographic diversity in terms of academic performance, college and non-college aspirations, gender, and race/ethnicity. The student interview group should also reflect low, as well as middle and high, income representatives. Students in this group should be chosen from students who are receiving services from programs such as alternative school, Special Education, At-Risk, English as a Second Language, Gifted and Talented, and Title I.

Districts should avoid selecting students who are children of teachers, administrators, school board members, or other employees for this interview.

1. Please introduce yourself by stating your name and grade and respond to this question: Describe an effective strategy teachers are using to help you learn.
2. What does your school do to help all students be successful and learn?
3. How do your teachers know if you are learning?
4. How do you know if you are learning?
5. In what ways do your teachers help students make real world applications to life outside the classroom?
6. What tools and technology are available in this school and how do teachers and students use the technology?
7. How is the school preparing students for the next level of education and/or the workforce/careers?
8. Describe the opportunities students have to develop and use leadership skills and provide input to school staff.
9. Sometimes in all schools, some students are teased (harassed). In your personal opinion, to what degree is that happening in your own school? (Above average, average, below average)

10. What actions do students take if they are bullied or harassed or see that happening to someone else?
11. Please share what academic and non-academic changes you hope your district/school will achieve in the next five years.

SUPERINTENDENT, CURRICULUM DIRECTOR, AND EQUITY COORDINATOR 2012-2013

Superintendent, Curriculum Director, and Equity Coordinator (Optional Format) - While this interview provides an opportunity to more deeply explore district programs and practices, it also provides the site visit team with an opportunity to ask questions that result from the district overview presentation, interview groups, and document review. It is also an opportunity for the interviewees to ask any questions he/she might have. The superintendent, curriculum director, and equity coordinator may also be called upon to answer questions throughout the site visit as needed. The equity coordinator may be a part of this interview or part of the building principals' interview, as appropriate.

Superintendent

1. Please tell us about the progress the district is making toward implementation of the Iowa Core.
2. How does the administrator (i.e., central office administrators and principals) evaluation impact continuous improvement?
3. Describe the process and benefits of the district's administrator mentoring and induction program. How is the effectiveness of the mentoring and induction program determined?
4. How is information regarding finances, student achievement, and other aspects of the district/school communicated to the public?
5. How are student learning data used systemically to improve teaching and student learning throughout the district?
6. What is the process to determine effectiveness of district programs (i.e., G/T, At-Risk, Special Education, ESL, etc.)
7. How does the district make connections with the community?
8. **Title IIA Required Question:** What steps does the district employ to ensure that poor and minority students are not taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers?
9. Please share what changes you hope your district/school will achieve in the next five years.

Curriculum Director

1. What is your involvement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development?
2. How does the district ensure students with diverse learning needs, including preschoolers, have access to the general education curriculum? (G/T, At-Risk, alternative setting, ELL)
3. How do you ensure all district personnel are working toward the goals noted in the district's/school's C-Plan?
4. As a district, how are student learning data used systemically to improve teaching and student learning?
5. Describe the opportunities teachers have for district and building level conversations about curriculum, including implementation of the Iowa Core.
6. Please share what changes you hope your district will achieve in the next five years.

Equity Coordinator

1. How does the district notify staff, students, and parents about your role as Equity Coordinator?
2. How do students, parents, and staff get information about the district's procedure for processing grievances related to the non-discrimination and harassment policies?
3. What equity/diversity-related issues/grievances have you dealt with in the past year?
4. What are you doing to ensure that students and staff are culturally competent?
5. What have you learned from your most recent analysis of building, program, and course enrollment data by racial/ethnic background, gender, and disability?